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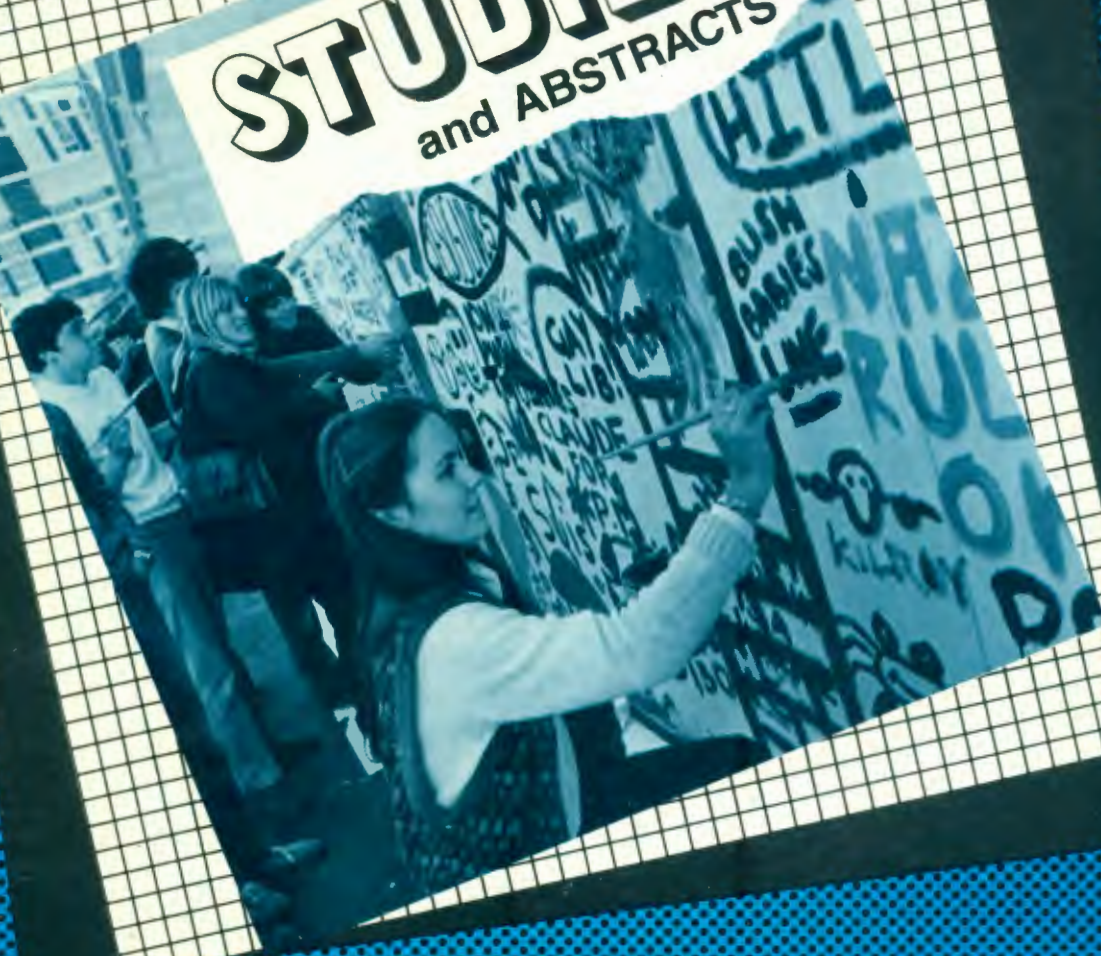
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# YOUTH

**STUDIES**  
and ABSTRACTS



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# EMPLOYMENT ACCESS FOR WHOM?

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*Since September 1985, Community Services Victoria has operated an Employment Access Program for 15-21 year old wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people. The Program's aim is to develop and maintain employment and training opportunities for the target group. This includes addressing structural inequalities such as access to Traineeships and Apprenticeships. But, who does the Program serve? Is it the young people who are prepared, placed and retained in employment? Or, is it the employers who decide whether to recruit, select and retain young people? The article discusses the role dilemmas and choices experienced by the Program's workers.*

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## **Background**

The Employment Access Program (EAP) was established in September 1985 under the auspices of the Community Services Victoria (CSV) and funded by the Department of Labour (DOL). The Program's pilot phase ends in September 1987 but CSV has decided that the Program will continue on an ongoing basis. The Department of Labour will provide a reducing level of support over the next three years - allowing CSV to phase in its support.

The Program's aim is to develop and maintain employment and training opportunities for 15-21 year old wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people. The importance of such a specific and intensive placement and retention service has been well documented overseas by writers such as Robert Taggart (1972) and Clyde E Sullivan and Wallace Mandell (1967).

## **Target group**

It is estimated that at any given time there are approximately 4,000 15-21 year olds in Victoria who are wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people and who are or have been in the care and/or custody of CSV. The numbers of

the target group in the six regions served has been approximately 1,300 at any given time - less than a third of the estimated target group. This does not include most young offenders above the age of 18 years who are the responsibility of the Office of Corrections.

Between September 1985 and February 1987, approximately 500 young people were placed in 644 job, education and training placements. Some young people were placed more than once. Of 524 job placements, 124 were with the State Additional Apprenticeship Scheme - 108 males and 16 females.

Placement figures, obviously, are not the same as employment retention - how long individuals remain in employment. There is some encouraging retention evidence from the Program's experience with State Apprenticeship Assistance Scheme (SAAS). In 1986, 76 young people were placed in SAAS. By 1987, a total of 66 per cent had completed the first year - 47 males and 3 females.

The Program's activities are not confined to the direct placement and retention of young people in employment. As already indicated, the Program's limited resources reduce its capacity to work effectively and efficiently with all members of the

target group. Furthermore, there are labour market barriers which preclude their placement and retention. These are summarised in Table 1.

With the cooperation of the Department of Labour in 1986, it was proposed to the then State Office of the Federal Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (now the Department of Employment, Education and Training) that a CEP target be established for wards, young offenders

and institutionalised young people. This was accepted and a target of 3 per cent established for the 1987 intake - an estimated eighty positions. While the target is now being implemented, the Federal Government decided in its May 1987 Mini-Budget, to abolish the Community Employment Program.

Traineeships are a new training system being developed by Government, unions and employers

TABLE 1

### The Barriers

An employment barrier is when policies, programs and services inhibit or prevent the participation of individuals or groups in the labour market.

The following table identifies four major barriers to the employment placement and retention of wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people - summarising the general applicability of the barrier to the unemployed and its specific applicability to members of the target group.

Barriers	General Impact on Unemployed	Specific Impact on Wards and Young Offenders
1. Shortage of appropriate jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competition for available jobs from other unemployed, previously discouraged workers re-entering the workforce and those currently employed.</li> <li>- 'Creaming' of applicants of jobs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General shortage of jobs makes impact on all disadvantaged young people.</li> </ul>
2. Discriminatory employment practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inappropriate eligibility (credentials, experience and skills) and recruitment practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stigmatisation of target group may occur because of institutional or offending background.</li> <li>- Institution based educational experience and work skills are not appropriately accredited and recognised.</li> </ul>
3. Discriminatory labour market opportunities (eg traineeships) and programs (eg Community Employment Program).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of knowledge and awareness.</li> <li>- Appropriately tailored targeting strategies not developed.</li> <li>- Placement priority given to visible and/or 'popular' groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specification depends on stigma identification.</li> <li>- Specific support mechanisms may not exist.</li> <li>- Target group is invisible unless identified.</li> <li>- Target group is small compared with other disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>
4. Inappropriate educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inadequate socialisation and integration.</li> <li>- Lack of knowledge regarding employment and training options.</li> <li>- Lack of access to career opportunities.</li> <li>- Lack of marketable skills either developed or recognised.</li> <li>- Truancy.</li> <li>- School exemptions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational experience/ skills acquired at institution not recognised or accredited.</li> <li>- Institutionalisation may prevent any or regular participation in external education.</li> <li>- Institutional experience may not facilitate socialisation and integration.</li> <li>- Higher than average truancy.</li> <li>- Higher than average school exemptions.</li> <li>- Education integration policy and practice does not necessarily recognise group's legitimacy.</li> </ul>



for young people. While there is an overall target of 15 per cent disadvantaged, traineeships do not incorporate affirmative employment strategies. The Victorian Government, however, has decided to target the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged using public sector traineeships.

The Employment Access Program has been working with the Disability Employment Action Centre, the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to prepare a policy paper on how the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged could be accessed with these traineeships.

The Program has also initiated a work practice project in apprenticeship occupations for members of the target group who have left school, and vocational trade and technical courses for particularly disadvantaged young people at Broadmeadows TAFE. Small sums of money are also being made available to CSV institutions and community groups in regions serviced by the EAP to increase the access of the target group to training opportunities.

It would seem apparent that the Program serves 15-21 year old young people who are or have been wards, young offenders and institutionalised.

## Role of Employers

The placement and retention of young people in employment depends on the ability and willingness of employers to recruit and retain young people. The primary interest of employers is to secure maximum productivity from individual workers.

The Program's relationship with employers is being explored by the evaluation undertaken by the Criminology Department at the University of Melbourne. As part of the evaluation process, employers have, and are being interviewed, concerning their experiences with the Program. In the first year of the Program, fifty-four employers were interviewed. It is anticipated that eighty employers will be interviewed for the second year of the evaluation. Forty-five of the fifty-four employers interviewed for the Interim Report (1986) thought that the Program should continue, four said that they did not know enough to comment and there were no responses to this question from eight employers. (pp 114, 176-177)

Employers were questioned about whether or not they would in the future employ members of the target group. Forty-seven said they would - twenty-six had no reservations and twenty-one

had some reservations. Six employers said that they would not employ a young person from the target group again and there was no recorded response for one employer. (pp 121, 180-181)

In discussing their experiences, employers most often listed emotional insecurity, instability and personality problems as major problems to the employment of the target group. The major training/work preparedness needs identified by employers were punctuality (14), presentation/appearance (12) and positive/responsible attitude (10). (pp 125, 179-180)

While employers have focused on the personal attributes of young people, it is not without some recognition of causative influences and most employers have said that humanitarian factors had influenced their decision. In agreeing to recruit members of the target group, employers believed that they were taking additional risks. Their willingness and ability to take this risk is critically influenced by the Program's support services. Employers emphasised the role of the Program's workers in giving them confidence and assisting them to work through problems: 'We need someone to call on if there are problems' and 'These kids need someone who knows the ins and outs of it all.' (p 182)

The Program's workers, then, are expected by employers to assist young people to adjust to the work and workplace requirements of employers - to conform to work and workplace norms. In general, the Program's workers work with individual employers rather than with employer organisations and with the CES in placing young people in jobs.

## Importance of Empowering Young Workers

The Program workers' role with employers is conditioned by its endorsement of the philosophy of youth advocacy - a commitment to empowering of young people. In practical terms, this necessitates young people developing a knowledge and understanding of their work and workplace rights and what expectations of employers are (un)reasonable. But, then, it also necessitates young people understanding when their own expectations are (un)reasonable.

It is important to realise the inherent limitations of a government program in endorsing a youth advocacy philosophy. While there is an inevitable disparity between philosophy and practice, bureaucratic and political imperatives and priorities impose their own constraints.



Young people interviewed by the evaluation team were positive about the Program's workers as being different from CSV officers. The CSV offices were described by the young people as a doctor's environment. It's like walking into a doctor's surgery. . . I reckon a lot of people would be too scared to go up there, with all the social workers and that hanging around; and I hate sitting in an office. (p 107)

This positive attitude towards the EAP appears to be based on the perceived separation of the five Employment Access Offices and the Apprenticeship Support Officer from CSV's traditional custodial and protective roles. The comments of the young people clearly reveal that they see the EAP workers as focusing on their employment rights and facilitating their access.

The Program's services are meant to be available on a voluntary basis. Young people referred to Program workers have, for instance, chosen not to take up the referral. This is in contrast to the involuntary relationship which young people may have with field workers or youth officers because of their statutory status.

This perceived separateness offers a warning that if the perception changes, then the effectiveness and efficiency of the Program could change. If the Program becomes increasingly identified with CSV's custodial and protective roles, then it could become increasingly ineffective and inefficient in its ability and willingness to work with young people.

### **Emphasis on Employment Retention**

The Program's focus should be on developing and accessing employment opportunities that are consistent with the actual or potential work skills and interests of young people. The emphasis, therefore, has to be on employment retention rather than job placement and retention - what will facilitate the long-term retention of young people in employment.

It is equally important to address structural inequalities in the labour market and the quality of work and workplaces. Placing young people in any job is not in the interests of employers or the young people if the jobs are inappropriate to their experiences, expectations and skills.

The Program will not guarantee employers that vacancies will be filled or that young people will remain in vacancies. This guarantee cannot be met for three reasons.

- Jobs vary in their appeal to young people and diverse work and workplace conditions influence the appropriateness of specific jobs for specific individuals. These factors include the variety and challenge of specific jobs, the attitudes and behaviour of supervisors and other workers, whether or not the workplace is unionised, occupational health and safety conditions, career linkages with jobs and the wages paid.
- Young people traditionally experience high mobility in their search for appropriate employment. High continuing levels of unemployment are constraining rather than eliminating this mobility. It is important for both young people and employers that young people experience different work and workplaces.
- The Program's credibility lies equally with employment outcomes and the relationship upon which these outcomes are based. As already noted, young people are not forced to use the services of the Program. While they may be advised to 'dress appropriately' for job interviews, this should not be a condition of assistance. The ultimate success of the Program depends on minimising perceived and actual overt and covert coercion.

The inability and unwillingness to guarantee the placement and retention of young people in jobs has variously constrained the Program's workers in their relationship with employers. SAAS is an exception because it is a labour market program in the public sector funded and controlled by the Department of Labour. This has given the Apprenticeship Support Officer the status to legitimately intervene in job situations.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of the Employment Access Program is instructive in addressing the service objectives of job preparation, placement and retention programs. Yet, the preceding analysis of the Employment Access Program has not provided a clear and conclusive answer. What has emerged is ambivalence in attempting to simultaneously meet the needs of young people and employers.

The Program's activities are conditioned by high continuing levels of unemployment. The unemployment rate for 15-19 year olds in the labour force has increased from 4.5 per cent in 1971 to 23 per cent in 1987. The Program, therefore, is influencing the allocation of employment - who gets what jobs where and how.

Success in placing and retaining a particularly



disadvantaged group of young people in employment does not demonstrate that there is work for every individual who wants to work. It is not demonstrating that the unemployed are becoming dependent on unemployment benefit.

Rather, it is demonstrating that a group of young people who have experienced long-term unemployment and/or discrimination in the labour market can obtain and retain jobs – if given a chance. Given their chances, other disadvantaged (un)employed would also be able to obtain and retain employment.

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## Invitation to Contribute

The Editor would like to hear from people who would like to write on youth related topics. Such topics include: secondary education, training, PEP, youth support schemes, disadvantaged youth, housing, welfare, health, leisure/culture, needs of ethnic youth, and young women. There is a guide to contributors in the back of this edition.

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